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REVIEW OF DEVELOPMENTS PERTAINING TO THE PROMOTION AND PROTECTION OF HUMAN RIGHTS AND FUNDAMENTAL FREEDOMS OF INDIGENOUS POPULATIONS

Information received from non-governmental organizations

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INTRODUCTION

1. By its resolution 1982/34 of 7 May 1982, the Economic and Social Council authorized the Sub-Commission on Prevention of Discrimination and Protection of Minorities to establish annually a working group on indigenous populations to review developments pertaining to the promotion and protection of the human rights and fundamental freedoms of indigenous populations, including information requested by the Secretary-General annually, and to give special attention to the evolution of standards concerning the rights of indigenous populations.

2. The Sub-Commission, in its resolution 1991/30 of 29 August 1991, requested the Secretary-General to transmit the report of the Working Group to indigenous peoples and non-governmental organizations. The Commission on Human Rights made the same request in its resolution 1992/44 of 3 March 1992. In accordance with these resolutions, appropriate communications were sent to the above-mentioned organizations.

3. The present document contains replies received as of 10 June 1992 from indigenous and non-governmental organizations pertaining to the promotion and protection of the human rights and fundamental freedoms of indigenous populations. Further replies, if any, will be included in addenda to this document.

INFORMATION RECEIVED FROM INDIGENOUS PEOPLES' ORGANIZATIONS

"Tupaj Katari" Indian movement

The immeasurable debt owed to the indigenous peoples

4. In the light of a critical and constructive analysis - taking full account of its causes and effects - of the quincentenary of the unprecedented aggression committed against the Amerindian nations exactly 500 years ago, we can assert without fear of contradiction that the decisive factor in the arrival of European colonialism on the Indo-American continent, with its infinitely bloody consequences, was, then as now, economic interest, the hunger and thirst for dominion over the wealth which mother earth so generously bestows upon us. Material interests completely transformed gold and silver, which the indigenous peoples had hitherto used as ornaments and for ritual purposes, into ordinary goods coveted for their monetary value, thereby giving rise to potential conflicts between the universe and the Indians, between its wealth and their labour.

5. Within the rationale of the war to conquer and subjugate indigenous peoples and nations, gold and silver, precious stones and nature's bounty have undoubtedly constituted the real driving-force in all periods of colonial history and an overriding obsession in the minds of the colonizers. Nothing other than economic factors, material interests, boundless egotistical ambition, and the desire for profit and riches at all costs can explain the reasoning of those who, against all reason, justify the destruction of indigenous civilizations, the annihilation of ancestral cultures, the sacking and pillaging of everything of commercial or monetary value, and the most barbarous forms of genocide perpetrated by the most inhuman methods throughout

five centuries. There can be no other objective explanation or any historical or moral justification. Attempts to invoke the so-called "mission to civilize barbarous peoples, to transmit culture from one people to another and to spread Christianity or to evangelize godless Indians" are but gross and hypocritical pretexts put forward to falsify historical truth.

6. The pillaging and sacking of the gold and silver violently wrested from their true owners is not merely a subject of historical interest, but an issue of outstanding topical importance because of its direct implications for the profound economic and social crisis affecting the peoples of the Americas. It is, of course, impossible either to determine the exact amount or to set the economic and financial value of the huge riches that were removed and carried off to the colonial mother countries, and to Spain in particular, thereby causing immeasurable material and moral loss and damage to the indigenous peoples and nations. However, sound data and figures are fortunately now available and enable us to make a partial estimate of the amount of gold and silver that were stolen with complete impunity from the Indo-American territories.

7. Among the distinguished authors who have written on the subject, the American historian and economist, Earl J. Hamilton, is particularly noteworthy. His research into the "quantitative theory of money" has made it possible to arrive at a rough estimate of the amount of the two main metals, gold and silver, removed from the Amerindian continent. In 1929 and subsequently in 1934, E.J. Hamilton undertook the arduous task of dusting off the documents in archives of the Casas de contratación (departments where records relating to the Spanish colonies are kept) in Seville and Madrid. On the basis of the data and figures to which he had access, he reached the following conclusion: the conquistadores carried off some 16,900 tons of silver and between 180 and 200 tons of gold from the Americas between 1503 and 1660. To this huge loot plundered by the colonizers should be added the incalculable amounts of gold and silver lost in various shipwrecks caused by international piracy and organized smuggling. In fact, the cow belonged to the Spanish crown, but others drank its milk.

8. According to other research, however, the records in Seville and Madrid are far from providing historians with the exact figures for the colossal and awesome amount of gold and silver that left the Americas every year for Spain. Among those authors that have provided fresh and valuable data for a relative and partial assessment of the colonial booty, we would mention the historian Joël Cornette, who in a recent article published in the French periodical L'Histoire advances the astronomical figures of 26,000 tons of silver and 17,000 tons of gold, extracted from open seams in the Americas during the period 1500-1600.

9. In his pamphlet entitled "Oro de la conquista versus deuda externa" (The gold of the conquest versus external debt), the journalist S. Cabrera, making estimates based on the amount of wealth referred to in legend and on the intrinsic value, came up with the mind-boggling figures of 21,500 tons of silver and 8,600 tons of gold extracted by the conquistadores. He presents the figures as follows:

> "8,600 tons of gold at US$ 11 million per ton comes to about US$ 95 billion; 21,500 tons of silver at US$ 140,000 per ton, comes to about US$ 3 billion. Consequently, the total amount of gold and silver extracted from the Americas up to 1600 was US$ 98 billion".

Thus, if we calculate the dollar values of gold and silver quoted on the London and Zurich exchanges, we can assert unerringly that Spain actually owes a great debt to our peoples and nations and that the colonial States bear direct or indirect responsibility for our countries' damaging underdevelopment.

10. The information contained in this paper on economic rights and the arguments put forward would be truncated and incomplete if we failed to mention the insatiable despoliation of the Cerro Rico in Potosí, whose fabulous wealth has contributed to the splendour of the old world, to its original capital accumulation, and paradoxically, to the suffering and impoverishment of the indigenous peoples. The amount of silver extracted over the centuries verges on the realm of legend and fantasy, and far outreaches human imagination. According to an oft-cited comparison, the silver ore mined would have been sufficient to build a bridge from Potosí to the palaces in Madrid, Seville and Valladolid. Thanks to Bolivian chroniclers and foreign researchers, we know that between 1545 and 1774 the value extracted from the mines in the silver mountain was 820,513,893 duros, i.e. an amount greater than the total money then in circulation in the European countries. In addition, according to partial data from the Casa de la Moneda (Mint) in Potosí, the wealth extracted from the Cerro Rico de Potosí between the beginning of the colonial period and independence in 1925 was approximately 2.474 billion billion pesos, currently worth the astounding figure of US$ 5,566,500,000 billion, which were surrendered to Spain.

11. And paradoxically, as the distinguished writer Galeano has observed, "The Indians have suffered and continue to suffer from the curse of their own wealth. That Potosí society, ailing from its ostentation and extravagence, only left Bolivia the distant memory of its splendour, the ruins of its temples and palaces, and 8 million Indian corpses that lie in the deep galleries of the once resplendent Potosí, the treasury of the world, the king of the mountains and the envy of kings".

12. The stream of wealth that flowed from the Americas leads us to a striking conclusion: for five centuries, the peoples and nations of this corner of the continent have been building up the fortune of the European mother countries. Like the fabulous amount of gold that belonged to the indigenous peoples, the flow of silver from Potosí made a huge contribution to the development of capitalism in Europe. In the past, silver drove the economy of Spain, and the economic development of Europe has been largely financed by the resources originating from generous Indian lands; nowadays the pillaging and exploitation are perpetrated by means of legal instruments and weapons, such as the external debt.

13. The debt phenomenon is an integral part of the historical continuum of the colonial process which began in 1492 and corresponds to the strategy of neo-colonial domination pursued by the rich countries against the poor countries. The umbilical cord nourishing this curse against the indigenous peoples is, and once again derives from, the colonial heritage. Because of

its disastrous repercussions on economic and social life, the external debt is a perverse tool of the world capitalist system, which was created precisely with the colonization of the Americas and which makes possible the enormous transfer of wealth from the poor countries to the rich and powerful countries. For example, every year the debtor countries of the third world pay more than US$ 50 billion in interest and amortization to the industrialized countries. Where Latin America is concerned, the situation is becoming increasingly dramatic. According to the Guadalajara Declaration, adopted in Mexico in 1991, those countries that had incurred a debt of over US$ 222.5 billion in 1980 had to pay US$ 365.9 billion in the past decade in profits and interest. The debt doubled in 10 years. In 1990, the external debt of the Americas as a whole was US$ 423 billion, or approximately US$ 1,500 a head. In other words, Latin America has become an exporter of capital to the economies of the industrialized world, to the tune of US$ 30 billion a year. These US$ 30 billion, which the poor peoples of the Indo-American continent - and in particular its indigenous populations - pay each year as usurious profits to the capitalist world, are equivalent to 3,000 tons of gold at a price of US$ 10 million a ton. A rough estimate of the capital outflow and other transactions between 1982 and 1990 would reveal the exorbitant figure of US$ 200 billion, equivalent to approximately 20,000 tons of gold looted from the peoples of Latin America.

14. The debt has thus become a form of bondage and the debt-ridden economies have become subject economies - a clear manifestation of neo-colonialism. Thanks to this more sophisticated mechanism of modern times, natural resources are being unscrupulously pillaged, the labour force is being exploited, and authoritarian political structures and Governments are being imposed, in accordance with the strategic interests of the North and the élites among the ruling class in the South. Which leads to the following conclusion: the debt is the natural offspring of economic dependence and political subordination, a factor in the social and cultural regression of peoples and nations, and a fundamental obstacle to the solution of the profound crisis besetting the indigenous populations, who have been reduced today to the status of pariahs and beggars around the throne of gold.

15. According to more recent information contained in the Final Declaration of the Second Regional Conference on Poverty in Latin America and the Caribbean, held in Quito in November 1990, the ranks of the poor are filled by some 270 million individuals, in other words, 62 per cent of the total population, while some 84 million eke out their existence in conditions of absolute poverty. The injustice is such that the poverty besetting these 270 million contrasts starkly with the opulence of small minorities, who in some cases make up less than 5 per cent of the population, but account for a considerable proportion of consumption, as was stated in the Guadalajara Declaration. The Chairman of the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB) has observed that dealing with the social problem in the Americas is essential in the overall approach to the regional economy, since between 40 and 45 per cent of the population are in the poverty category.

16. This widespread impoverishment has a particularly brutal impact on children. According to a report by UNICEF, some 500,000 children die each year in the third world as a direct result of the debt policy. As far as the Americas are concerned, one child dies from disease and hunger every minute,

while 100 million more are in such a state of neglect that they live, eat and sleep in the streets. The neo-liberal adjustments introduced under the auspices of the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank have given rise to a potential social debt that threatens to explode in various parts of the region. In actual fact, these two financial institutions are the main instruments for the looting and the destruction of the environment, and bear responsibility for the human misery.

17. The repayment of the external debt is morally reprehensible, no longer of historical relevance and materially impossible. To conclude, the former colonial mother countries are ethically and morally obliged to shoulder their historical and political responsibility to make good the immeasurable damage caused by the war of aggression, by compensating its victims, in accordance with the international standards and instruments in force.